Spiritualist — Mary Todd Lincoln Drawer 4A Religious Contacts

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Abraham Lincoln and Religion

Spiritualist

Mary Todd Lincoln

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the

Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

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WASHINGTON IN LINCOLN'S TIME

BY

NOAH BROOKS

AUTHOR OF "AMERICAN STATESMEN" AND "ABRAHAM LINCOLN, AND THE DOWNFALL OF AMERICAN SLAVERY," ETC.

NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1895

pressive promises of those who besieged him for "early and exclusive" information.

AN INTERRUPTED SÉANCE

THE most terrifying threat that could be held over a zealous war-correspondent was that of arrest and confinement in the old Capitol prison. Every person who spent much time in Washington during the war will recall with mingled amusement and dread the freedom with which this threat was bandied about among people who were not by any means authorized to promote the rapid transit of anybody to that malodorous Bastille. Let me give an instance in which, though one of the unauthorized, I made use of this fear-compelling threat. A seamstress employed in the White House had induced Mrs. Lincoln to listen to the artful tales of a so-called spiritual medium who masqueraded under the name of Colchester, and who pretended to be the illegitimate son of an English duke. The poor lady at that time was well-nigh distraught with grief at the death of her son Willie. By playing on her motherly sorrows, Colchester actually succeeded in inducing Mrs. Lincoln to receive him in the family residence at the Soldiers' Home, where, in a darkened room, he pretended to produce messages from the dead boy by means of scratches on the wainscoting and taps on the walls and furniture. Mrs. Lincoln told me of these so-called manifestations, and asked me to be present in the White House when Colchester would give an exhibition of his powers. I declined; but meanwhile I received an invitation to invest one dollar and attend "a Colchester sitting" at the house of a Washington gentleman who was a profound believer in this pretentious seer. To gratify my curiosity, I paid the entrance fee, and, accompanied by a trusty friend, went to the séance. After the company had been seated around the table in the usual approved manner, and the lights were turned out, the silence was broken by the thumping of a drum, the twanging of a banjo, and the ringing of bells, all of which instruments had been laid on the table, ready for use. By some hocus-pocus, it was evident, the operator had freed his hands from the hands of those who sat on each side of him, and was himself making "music in the air." Loosening my hands from my neighbors', who were unbelievers, I rose, and, grasping in the direction of the drum-beat, grabbed a very solid and fleshy hand in which was held a bell that was being thumped on a drum-head. I shouted, "Strike a light!" My friend, after what appeared to be an unconscionable length of time, lighted a match; but meanwhile somebody had dealt me a severe blow with the drum, the edge of which cut a slight wound on my forehead. When the gas was finally lighted, the singular spectacle was presented of "the son of the duke" firmly grasped by a man whose forehead was covered with blood, while the arrested scion of nobility was glowering at the drum and bells which he still held in his hands. The meeting broke up in the most admired disorder, "Lord Colchester" slipping out of the room in the confusion. His host subsequently brought

down word from the discomfited seer to the effect that Colchester was "so outraged by this insult" that he refused to reappear!

A day or two after this, I was astonished by a note from Mrs. Lincoln requesting me to come to the White House without a moment's delay, on a matter of the most distressing importance. On my arrival, the lady, somewhat discomposed, showed me a note from "Colchester," in which he requested that she should procure for him from the War Department a pass to New York, and intimated that in case she refused he might have some unpleasant things to say to her. We made an arrangement by which Colchester came to the White House at a specified hour the next day, and after I had been formally introduced to the charlatan, Mrs. Lincoln withdrew from the room. Going up to Colchester, I lifted the hair from the scar on my forehead, yet unhealed, and said, "Do you recognize this?" The man muttered something about his having been insulted, and then I said: "You know that I know you are a swindler and a humbug. Get out of this house and out of this city at once. If you are in Washington to-morrow afternoon at this time, you will be in the old Capitol prison." The little scamp pulled himself together and sneaked out of the house, and, so far as I know, out of Washington. I never saw or heard of him afterward.

SOCIAL INCIDENTS

THE White House did not witness many brilliant festivities during the war, after that famous party

which was given by the President and Mrs. Lincoln early in the first year of the Lincoln administration. But Mrs. Lincoln's afternoon receptions and the President's public levees were held regularly during the winters. Nothing could be more democratic than these gatherings of the people at the White House. They were usually held twice a week during the winter, those on Tuesday evenings being so-called dress receptions, and the Saturday levees being less formal in character. A majority of the visitors went in full dress: the ladies in laces, feathers, silks, and satins, without bonnets; and the gentlemen in evening dress. But sprinkled through the gaily attired crowds were hundreds of officers and private soldiers, the light-blue army coat of the period being a conspicuous feature of the moving panorama. Here and there a day-laborer, looking as though he had just left his work-bench, or a hard-working clerk with ink-stained linen, added to the popular character of the assembly. Usually the President stood in the famous Blue Room, or at the head of the East Room; and those who wished to shake hands made their entrance, one by one, and were introduced by the functionary detailed for that occasion. So vast were the crowds, and so affectionate their greetings, that Mr. Lincoln's right hand was often so swollen that he would be unable to use it readily for hours afterward; and the white kid glove of his right hand, when the operation of handshaking was over, always looked as if it had been dragged through a dust-bin. Much of the time, I think, the President never heard with his inner ear the

Abraham Lincoln

By ROBERT G. INGERSOLL

"He had the touch of nature that makes the whole world kin."

Lincoln had intellect without arrogance, Genius without pride, and religion without cant—that is to say, without bigotry and without deceit. He was an orator—clear, sincere, natural. He did not pretend. He did not say what he thought others thought, but what he thought.

If you wish to be sublime you must be natural—you must keep close to the grass. You must sit by the fireside of the heart; above the clouds it is too cold.

Lincoln was an immense personality—firm but not obstinate. He influenced others without effort, unconsciously; and they submitted to him as men submit to nature—unconsciously. He was severe with himself, and for that reason lenient with others. He did merciful things as stealthily as others committed crimes.

Almost ashamed of tenderness, he said and did the noblest words and deeds with that charming confusion, that awkwardness, that is the perfect grace of modesty.

Through days and nights of sorrow, through years of grief and pain, with unswerving purpose, "with malice towards none, with charity for all," with infinite patience, with unclouded vision, he hoped and toiled. Stone after stone was laid, until at last the Proclamation found its place. On that the Goddess stands.

He knew others, because perfectly acquainted with himself. He cared nothing for place, but everything for principle; little for money, but everything for independence. He knew no fear, except the fear of doing wrong. Hating slavery, pitying the master—seeking to conquer, not persons, but prejudices—he was the embodiment of the self-denial, the courage, the hope, and the nobility of a Nation.

He spoke not to inflame, not to upbraid, but to convince. He raised his hands, not to strike, but in benediction. He longed to pardon. He loved to see the pearls of joy on the cheeks of a wife whose husband he had rescued from death.

Lincoln was the grandest figure of the fiercest civil war. He is the gentlest memory of our world.

(Read "Was Abraham Lincoln a Spiritualist?" to learn of his interesting experiences in the phenomena of Spiritualism through the mediumship of Nettie Colburn Maynard.)

Genuine Spirit Photograph of President Lincoln

In 1867, two years after Mr. Lincoln's death, Mrs. Lincoln visited the photograph gallery of Mr. William Mumler in Boston, Massachusetts.

She did not give him her name but went incog., and sat for her picture under another name. When she went to obtain her proof the lady in attendance said to her: "Madam, a very strange result has come upon the plate with your photo. President Lincoln is standing behind you." She answered: "That is all right. I am his widow."

Many copies were taken from the original negative and sold, both in Boston and the societies of the students of Occult Phenomena. One was copied on a half-tone plate in Paris, France, which was a true replica of the original photograph with Mrs. Lincoln. The publisher of this half-tone enlargement also had a proof from the original plate and knows the exact truth of obtaining of the original negative, being intimately acquainted with Mr. Mumler's brother, after William Mumler had "passed on" to the next realm of life through the gateway of death.

The National Spiritualist

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To Be a Spiritualist Is to Know Spiritualism as a Science, to Accept It as a Philosophy, to Practice It as a Religion.

This spirit picture is historic. It shows Abraham Lincoln, as an extra, two years after his passing, standing behind his wife. In 1867 Mrs. Lincoln, who, like her husband, was a Spiritualist, paid a visit to William H. Mumler, a photographic medium in Boston.

She gave the name of Mrs. Tyndall. Mrs. Lincoln was dressed in black and, prior to the picture being taken, wore a veil over her face. (See picture extreme right.)

According to the record, Mumler did not know who she was and had no means of knowing. He was accustomed, however, to strangers asking for seances. Her visit called for no special comment.

When a print was taken of the negative, Mumler immediately recognized the extra as President Lincoln. He showed it to his visitor and asked if she identified it. She replied that she did.

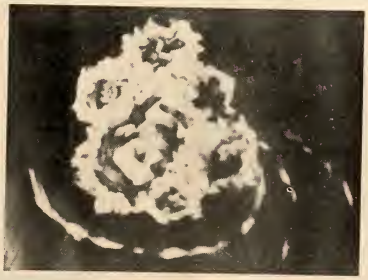
Another woman who was present, on seeing it, exclaimed, "Why this looks like President Lincoln." Mrs. Lincoln answered, 'Yes, it does. I am his widow."

This Spirit Photograph Convinced Mrs. Lincoln

Psychic Observer

When Lincoln's wife went for a sitting with Mumler, noted Spirit Photographer of the Civil War days, the picture above was received. Its authenticity was not questioned by Mrs. Lincoln at any time and to this day this picture remains unchallenged.

A Rare Spirit Photograph



Psychic Observer

The authenticity of above photograph is vouched for by the editor of this journal who took the picture with a Brownie No. 2 camera during a seance at the home of Reid Williams, Secretary of Southern Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp (1937). By turning the picture upside down, the upper portion of a Negro's body is plainly visible. Significant evidence. The other two women were identified.

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LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Number 888 FORT WAYNE, INDIANA April 15, 1946

THE LINCOLNS AND SPIRITUALISM

This bulletin has presented from time to time certain numbers discussing religious influences exerted over the Lincolns by clergymen and laymen of the Baptist, Catholic, Disciple, Methodist and Presbyterian faiths. The discovery of an unpublished letter written by Mary Lincoln has prompted this brief monograph on the Lincolns and Spiritualism.

It has been accepted generally that after the death of Willie Lincoln at Washington in February, 1862, both Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln attended seances in the White House and elsewhere. Just how much they were influenced by these demonstrations is a matter of conjecture.

There is but one book worthy of attention, that sets forth the Lincolns' contacts with Spiritualism. It was written by a medium named Nettie Coleman Maynard. Mrs. Maynard states in the preface dated September, 1891, that the manuscript for her book "has been prepared at intervals during the past three years by the aid of an amanuensis." The long period of time intervening between the happenings and the recording, of course discounts to a large extent the accuracy of her reminiscences, which would try to recall the exact words used by participants in seances which occurred more than a quarter of a century before. Yet, the general statements identifying those present on some of these occasions can be depended upon.

Mrs. Maynard could not have been much younger than five years of age when she remembered the first demonstrations at her home in 1845 which would place her birth about 1840. At the time of her introduction to Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln in 1861 she must have been twenty-one or older. There is evidence that over a period of four years Mr. Lincoln may have attended at least four seances and Mrs. Lincoln undoubtedly was present more frequently.

Among the many pamphlets written on the Lincolns and the subject of Spiritualism, only one monograph seems to be of importance and that one especially for its illustrations which attempt to visualize the President's attendance at different seances.

A delegate to the Progressive Spiritualists Convention held in Springfield, Missouri, in 1896 made a statement which appeared in the St. Louis Globe Democrat for March 31 of that year, in which he claimed, "Lincoln, as is well established by history, was as firm a believer in Spiritualism as any member of the association."

In the centenary year of Lincoln's birth, 1909, Missouri spiritualists met in St. Joseph, Mo., and a dispatch to the Globe Democrat dated May 27 reported that a delegate claimed "Lincoln was the first Spiritualist of any consequence in this country," stating that "he had seances before he was elected to the presidency." This statement was somewhat modified by another delegate, Rev. Thomas Grimshaw who said, "It would hardly be fair to designate Lincoln as a Spiritualist, though he is known to have accepted in a general way the truths of our religion."

Some years ago the Lincoln National Life Foundation acquired a record book of the seances held at 1046 Bergen St., Brooklyn, from Oct. 15, 1910, to January 28, 1911, inclusive. The long-hand writing by the recorder, Charles McArthur, fills 400 pages of a ledger which is designated as volume number seven. Messages are recorded from such celebrities as: Aurelius, Beecher, Philip Brooks, Channing, General Grant, Julia Ward Howe, Ingersoll, William James, Kant, Paine, Socrates, Queen Victoria, Zoroaster, and of course, Abraham Lincoln.

During this interval three Lincoln addresses of from 600 to 1200 words are copied which deal almost exclusively with moral and spiritual concepts of a general nature. The introductory words and a paragraph credited to Mr. Lincoln in a speech supposed to have been made on the night of Nov. 26, 1910, are sufficient to illustrate the general character of the remarks. The absence of any literary style comparable to Lincoln's, is noticeable.

"Good evening! I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to you again. I am glad to witness the faithfulness of those who have a definite purpose in view. . . . As I ponder it seems to me that there is so much we all should be thankful for. As we turn our gaze backward to times past and contemplate what the struggles of those far-away days meant, we cannot help but think those were days when souls turned to the Great One above and voiced their thanks that He had maintained the great Light House on the shores of yonder spheres."

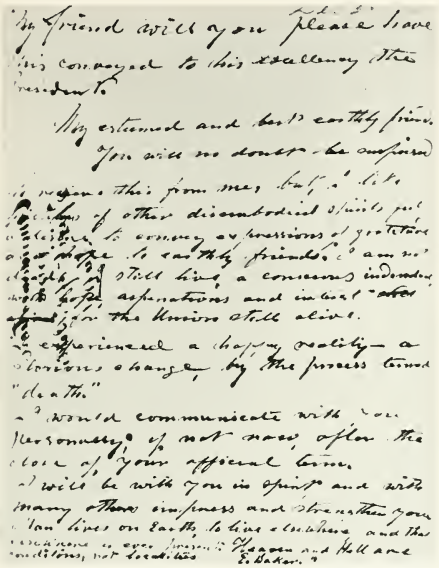
The Progressive Thinker for July 7, 1927, presents a story by Mrs. Ruth Glenn who accompanied Mrs. Julia England, a Chicago medium to the tomb of Lincoln at Springfield on the preceding July 4th. Mrs. Glenn records a message which Mrs. England claimed was from the departed Lincoln which opened by Mr. Lincoln speaking as follows: "I am here to tell you that Abraham Lincoln is not dead. He has arisen. I am here to tell you that I walk the streets of your city and visit your consuls as I did of yore. . . . I was a Spiritualist from the crown of my head to the tips of my toes."

Lincoln in replying to a Chicago clergyman who had stated that his recommendation to the President, was "a message to you from our Divine Master," queried "Is it not odd that the only channel He could send it by, was the roundabout route by way of that awful city of Chicago?" Using the same type of reasoning Lincoln must have had some misgivings about individuals some of them without even elementary intellectual training, becoming vehicles which would bring him advice from the sages.

As late as 1845 there appeared in the February issue of The National Spiritualist a photograph of Mary Lincoln with what was described as a "Genuine Spirit Photograph of President Lincoln" in dim outline in back of her. The photograph is said to have been taken by Mr. William Mumler at Boston, Mass., in 1867.

But now we need not even speculate about the question of Mary Lincoln's affiliation with the body known as Spiritualists as she answers for herself in a long letter written in Frankfurt am Main on November 20, 1869, to Mrs. Orne then in Paris. The original letter is in the fine Lincoln collection at Franklin & Marshall College, Lancaster, Pa. Mrs. Orne's letter to Mrs. Lincoln which apparently brought up the question of Spiritualism is not available, but the excerpt from Mary Lincoln's letter forever settles the question of her affiliation with the society.

"My husband had the highest appreciation of your many excellences. I am not either a Spiritualist, but I sincerely believe our loved ones, who have only 'gone before' are permitted to watch over those who were dearer to them than life."



Photograph made from micro-film of original document in the Library of Congress

The sixth page of J. B. Conkling's spirit message translated for easy reading. (See printed contents of the message in article.)

dentalism of the period and it went hand in hand with the crusade for temperance and against slavery." For some unexplainable reason spiritualism was not a fad in the southern states.

The editor of the *Spiritual Scientist* is quoted in a book entitled "Nineteenth Century Miracles" by Emma Hardinge Britten, 1883, page 485, to the effect that "For four succeeding Sundays Mr. Conkling was a guest at the presidential mansion. Mr. Conkling has himself alleged to the author, that the Spirits not only urged the subject of the emancipation proclamation, but that they, in the name of the Independence Fathers, spelled out, letter by letter, the preliminary draft of that famous document. The result of these interviews was the president's proposition to his Cabinet to issue such a proclamation, and the final success of the stupendous work, is recorded in the national archives of the country. The influence exerted by the celebrated test medium Conkling, was not the only one brought to bear upon the good president . . . " Of course, only a spiritualist could believe that the Emancipation Proclamation can be attributed to spirit intercession.

The date of the E. Baker letter is December 28, 1861. Was this the Saturday that Kase and Conkling are believed to have visited the presidential mansion? Emma Hardinge Britten, in her book "Nineteenth Century Miracles" adds to the confusion by stating "that Colonel S. P. Kase, of Philadelphia, being deeply interested in railroad undertakings, was compelled to visit the capital in 1862 . . . " However, the title of the Kase pamphlet indicates that the spirit manifestation, that lead to the writing of the Emancipation Proclamation occurred in the year 1861. One writer, Earl S. Haines, in "A Research Report" that is unpublished, was of the opinion that the first meeting between Lincoln and Conkling took place on Sunday, December 29, 1861 to be followed by three succeeding Sundays, thereafter.

Was Abraham Lincoln a spiritualist? The spiritualists say "Yes" and the historians say "No." A great deal of spiritualistic literature has been published, of which the Foundation has an abundance, concerning Lincoln's interest in the cult. Certainly there is ample evidence that Mr. Lincoln attended at least four seances, and perhaps had several conferences with mediums in his office.

To be sure, Mrs. Lincoln took spiritualism much more seriously than her husband. She attended many seances in the White House and elsewhere. It has been generally agreed that after the death of Willie Lincoln on February 20, 1862, that Mrs. Lincoln believed in the communication with the invisible and she thought she could distinguish the apparition of the dead. However, in later life Mrs. Lincoln wrote: "Time . . . has at length taught & convinced me, that the loved & idolized being, comes no more." In 1864 she wrote: "I am not either a spiritualist but I sincerely believe our loved ones, who have only 'gone before' are permitted to watch over those who were dearer to them than life."

When one tries to relate these spiritualistic events chronologically, with which President and Mrs. Lincoln were involved, or to give some historical significance to the seances which they attended, the topic seems to become as illusive as the rappings of a medium.

One thing that we can be sure about, however, is that Lincoln preserved the spirit message from his old friend E. Baker.

"Lord Colchester" — Spirit Medium

Following the death of Willie Lincoln on February 20, 1862, Mrs. Lincoln, distraught with grief, turned to spiritualism with the hope that she might contact Willie's spirit. It was a Negro seamstress, Mrs. Elizabeth Keckley, employed in the White House, who induced Mrs. Lincoln to attempt to reach her dead son through the mediumship of Colchester.

Colchester claimed to be the illegitimate son of an English duke and according to numerous observers he often mystified his audience with his so-called manifestations. Most spiritualist mediums worked in the dark but Colchester could perform his spirit rapping in broad daylight.

In the summer of 1862 he induced Mrs. Lincoln to receive him at the Soldier's Home which was the summer residence of the Lincolns. Mrs. Lincoln was at first impressed with these so-called manifestations which produced messages from her dead son by means of "scratches on the wainscoting and taps on the wall and furniture."

Mrs. Lincoln told Noah Brooks about Colchester and invited him to attend a White House seance. He declined. Instead, Brooks, accompanied by an unbelieving friend, paid a $1.00 admission fee and attended "a Colchester sitting." Brooks considered Colchester a fraud and intended to expose him. A group, holding hands, sat around a table, with the lights turned out. (Colchester could do so much more in the dark). Suddenly there was a thumping of a drum and a twanging of a banjo, accompanied by the ringing of bells. Brooks surmised that Colchester somehow had freed his hands from those who sat beside him and was making the strange sounds. Brooks' hands were held by unbelievers who allowed him to break the circle and lunge in the direction of the sounds, all the while shouting, "strike a light!" A match was lighted and there stood "the son of the duke" with the drum and bells still held in his hands. Brooks' forehead was covered with blood, having received a blow on the head from the drum which had been used as a weapon by Colchester.

The seance was suddenly ended and Colchester slipped out of the room. According to Brooks, Colchester was "so outraged by this insult that he refused to reappear." A day or two later he is alleged to have written Mrs. Lincoln a letter requesting a War Department pass to New York, with a veiled threat that if she refused he would have some unpleasant things to say to her.

Mrs. Lincoln immediately summoned Brooks and they made a date with Colchester the next day at a specified hour. When he arrived, Mrs. Lincoln introduced Brooks to Colchester and then withdrew. Brooks thereupon showed Colchester the unhealed scar on his forehead. Colchester insisted that he had been insulted, and Brooks called him a swindler and a humbug, and ordered him to leave Washington or risk being incarcerated in the

Photograph of Mrs. Lincoln with a so-called spirit photograph of President Lincoln

The following information about this photograph is taken from *The National Spiritualist*, February, 1945:

"In 1867, two years after Mr. Lincoln's death Mrs. Lincoln visited the photograph gallery of Mr. William Mumler in Boston, Massachusetts.

"She did not give him her name but went incog., and sat for her picture under another name. When she went to obtain her proof the lady in attendance said to her: 'Madam, a very strange result has come upon the plate with your photo. President Lincoln is standing behind you.' She answered: 'That is all right I am his widow.'

"Many copies were taken from the original negative and sold, both in Boston and the societies of the students of occult phenomena. One was copied on a half-tone plate in Paris, France, which was a true replica of the original photograph with Mrs. Lincoln. The publisher of this half-tone enlargement also had a proof from the original plate and knows the exact truth of obtaining the original negative, being intimately acquainted with Mr. Mumler's brother, after William Mumler had passed on to the next realm of life through the gateway of death."

This cut was made from a photograph taken from Catherine Coffin Phillips' book, "Cornelius Cole — California Pioneer and United States Senator. . .." San Francisco, 1929, opposite page 267. Mrs. Lincoln sent this particular photograph to Olive Cole, the wife of Senator Cornelius Cole, along with some explanatory clippings taken from *The Present Age* of March 23, 1872, and from the Boston *Daily Herald*.

Other spirit photographs of Lincoln have been published from time to time but in many cases they strangely resemble those with a Meserve classification.

Old Capital Prison. So far as Brooks was concerned, Colchester was never heard of again.

Meanwhile, President Lincoln was very much concerned over his wife's interest in spiritualism, and at the same time he was puzzled by Colchester's daylight seances. In view of this interest he asked Joseph Henry, the Superintendent of the Smithsonian Institution, to attempt to learn how Colchester produced the strange cracking sounds.

Colchester was interviewed by Henry, and with an attitude of insolent superiority the medium proceeded to confound the scientist completely. Henry did observe, however, that the sounds did not come from the room but from the person of the medium. Colchester ended the interview laughing.

Quite by accident Henry discovered Colchester's secret. While traveling on a train he happened to sit by a young passenger, and in making friendly conversation his traveling companion mentioned that he was a manufacturer of telegraph instruments. He even volunteered the information that "I also make them for spiritualists." The young man explained how his device would fit around the bicep, whereby the medium, by expanding his muscle could produce sharp clicks like a telegraph key. Henry's young friend said, "Have you heard of that Colchester fellow? He uses my equipment." Lincoln was pleased to learn the secret.

Laboring under the Brooks' threat of the Old Capital Prison, Colchester apparently did leave Washington for awhile. However, there is evidence that in January, 1865, Colchester was residing in the Capital and was astonishing many people with his tests. Warren Chase, a member of the Illinois general assembly, made the statement that "Colchester . . . often received from public men ten and twenty dollars for the tests given when he asked nothing. He was a very generous and a remarkable test medium but he told me he often cheated the fools as he could easily do it, but never deceived the honest and intelligent inquirer."

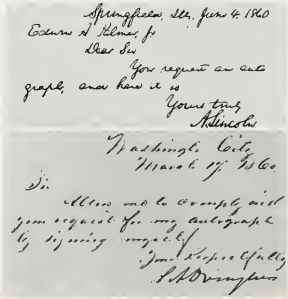
Editor's Note: For additional information on Lincoln and spiritualism see **Lincoln Lore** No. 888, April 15, 1946, "The Lincolns and Spiritualism"

"You Request My Autograph . . ."

Abraham Lincoln's mode of expression can not be excelled for briefness and simplicity, yet at the same time he had the knack of injecting into his writings a bit of his personality. His genius for original expression is to be found in his addresses, letters, endorsements, recommendations, orders and even bank checks.

In reply to an autograph collector Lincoln would usually write, "You request my autograph. Well, here it is," or "here 'tis." In the Foundation's collection there is a note addressed to Edwin A. Palmer, Jr., written at Springfield, Illinois on June 4, 1860. Lincoln wrote, "You request my autograph and here it is."

Stephen A. Douglas possessed no such literary flair. In a letter dated March 17, 1860, the original of which is in the Foundation collection, he wrote J. Parrish, Esq., an autograph seeker: "Sir, Allow me to comply with your request for my autograph by signing myself, Yours Respectfully, S. A. Douglas."



Springfield, Ills. June 4 1860
Edwin A. Palmer Jr.
Dear Sir
You request an autograph, and here it is
Yours truly
Abe Lincoln

Washington City
March 17 1860
Sir
Allow me to comply with your request for my autograph by signing myself
Yours Respectfully
S. A. Douglas

From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

Mary's Charlatans

Journalist Henry Villard noted Mary Todd Lincoln started contributing to President Lincoln's troubles as soon as the family arrived in Washington. She had very strong opinions about people. If she could not convince her husband directly, she sometimes tried more circuitous routes to obtain her way. Villard said: "She meddled not only with the distribution of minor offices, but even with the assignment of places in the Cabinet. Moreover, she allowed herself to be approached, and continuously surrounded by a common set of men and women, who, through her susceptibility to even the most bare-faced flattery, easily gained a controlling influence over her."[1]

Lord Colchester

The situation worsened in the spring of 1862 after Willie Lincoln died. In order to relieve Mrs. Lincoln's grief, her seamstress, Elizabeth Keckley, encouraged her to patronize spiritualists and mediums. Some "friends", like Henry Wikoff and Lord Colchester, were accomplished frauds. Others may have sincerely held their beliefs. Still others like Nettie Colburn Maynard, a spiritualist who conducted many seances for Mrs. Lincoln, were simply professionals at their phony craft. Whatever their intention, they certainly wrecked havoc with Mrs. Lincoln's mental state. Orville Browning recorded in his diary acarriage ride he took with Mrs. Lincoln on January 1, 1863: "Mrs. Lincoln told me she had been, the night before, with Old Isaac Newton, out to Georgetown, to see a Mrs. Laury, a spiritualist and she had made wonderful revelations to her about her little son Willy who died last winter, and also about things on the earth. Among other things she revealed that the cabinet were all enemies of the President, working for themselves, and that they would have to be dismissed." [2]

Oliver Halstead

Isaac Newton

"Spiritualism, the accompaniment of long and wasting wars, was rampant in the capital in the third winter of conflict. People sat hand in hand around tables in the dark, to hear bells rung and drums thumped and banjos twanged," noted historian Margaret Leech. "The mediums were coining money in the capital. One of the most successful was a young and personable man called Colchester, who claimed to be the illegitimate son of an English duke. Mrs. Lincoln received him into her home, and hopefully listened to the scratches and taps which were supposed to represent messages from Willie."

Gen. Dan Sickles

Spiritualists also used the mail as an medium for their shenanigans, according to William O. Stoddard. "The spiritualists favored him constantly, and I still have in my possession urgent epistles signed with the facsimile signatures of half the dead worthies in our history, not to speak of sundry communications from the Apostles and the Angel Garbiel, of the correctness of whose signatures I am not so certain. As a general thing, during the war, we believed that so soon as a man went clean crazy his first absolutely insane act was to open a correspondence, on his side, with the President."[3]

Chevalier Henry Wikoff

For both Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln, communication with the dead seemed natural. President Lincoln

once asked a Union army officer: Do you ever find yourself talking with the dead? Since Willie's death, I catch myself every day involuntarily talking with him as if he were with me."

"The days during which the President lay in state before they took him away for his long progress over the country he had saved were even more distressing than grief would have made them," security guard William Crook later recalled. "Mrs. Lincoln was almost frantic with suffering. Women spiritualists in some way gained access to her. They poured into her ears pretended messages from her dead husband. Mrs. Lincoln was so weakened that she had not force enough to resist the cruel cheat. These women nearly crazed her. Mr. Robert Lincoln, who had to take his place now at the head of the family, finally ordered them out of the house." [4]

Dr. Anson G. Henry remained at Mrs. Lincoln's side for six weeks however. "I believe our departed friends hover over and around us, and are fully cognizant of all that transpires, while we are not sensible of their presence," Henry wrote his wife about his beliefs. "I have made Mrs. Lincoln a convert to this doctrine & it is fast becoming a great source of comfort and consolation to her. When I was to see her this evening she was comparatively joyous." [5]

Footnotes

1. Henry Villard, *Lincoln on the Eve of '61*, p. 103.
2. Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years and the War Years*, p. 394.
3. Michael Burlingame, editor, *Inside the White House in War Times*, White House Sketches #4, p. 157 from William Stoddard, *White House Sketches*, No. 4."
4. Margarita Spalding Gerry, editor, *Through Five Administrations: Reminiscences of Colonel William H. Crook*, p. 69-70.
5. Harry E. Pratt, "Dr. Anson G. Henry, Lincoln's Physician and Friend," *Lincoln Herald*, Volume 45, No. 3, October 1943, p. 38.

Visit

Elizabeth Keckley
Red Room

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Charles J. Colchester

Charles J. Colchester was a medium whose spiritual gifts were as fake as his noble pedigree. He conducted seances for Mrs. Lincoln - including at least one at the Soldier's Home. His shenanigans were exposed by journalist Noah Brooks, who was one Mrs. Lincoln's benign male favorites. Brooks not only exposed Colchester; he also broke up Colchester's attempt to blackmail Mrs. Lincoln:

> The most terrifying threat that could be held over a zealous war-correspondent was that of arrest and confinement in the old Capitol prison. Every person who spent much time in Washington during the war will recall with mingled amusement and dread the freedom with which this threat was bandied about among people who were not by any means authorized to promote the rapid transit of anybody to that malodorous bastille. Let me give an instance in which, though one of the unauthorized, I made use of this fear-compelling threat. A seamstress [Elizabeth Keckley] employed in the White House had induced Mrs. Lincoln to listen to the artful tales of a so-called spiritual medium who masqueraded under the name of Colchester, and who pretended to be the illegitimate son of an English duke. The poor lady at that time was well-nigh distraught with grief at the death of her son Willie. By playing on her motherly sorrows, Colchester actually succeeded in inducing Mrs. Lincoln to receive him in the family residence at the Soldier's Home, where, in a darkened room, he pretended to produce messages from the dead boy by means of scratches on the wainscoting and taps on the walls and furniture. Mrs. Lincoln told me of these so-called manifestations, and asked me to be present in the White House when Colchester would give an exhibition of his powers. I declined; but meanwhile I received an invitation to invest one dollar and attend 'a Colchester sitting' at the house of a Washington gentleman who was a profound believer in this pretentious seer. To gratify my curiosity, I paid the entrance fee, and accompanied by a trusty friend, went to the seance. After the company had been seated around the table in the usual approved manner, and the lights were turned out, the silence was broken by the thumping of a drum, the twanging of a banjo, and the ringing of bells, all of which instruments had been laid on the table, ready for use. By some hocus-pocus, it was evident, the operator had freed his hands from the hands of those who sat on each side of him, and was himself making 'music in the air.' Loosening my hands from my neighbors', who were unbelievers, I rose, and, grasping in the direction of the drum-beat, grabbed a very solid and fleshy hand in which was held a bell that was being thumped on a drum-head. I shouted, 'Strike a light!' My friend, after what appeared to be an unconscionable length of time, lighted a match; but meanwhile somebody had dealt me a severe blow with the drum, the edge of which cut a slight wound on my forehead. When the gas was finally lighted, the singular spectacle was presented of 'the son of the duke' firmly grasped by a man whose forehead was covered with blood, while the arrested scion of nobility was glowering at the drum and bells which he still held in his hands. The meeting broke up in the most admired disorder, 'Lord Colchester' slipping out of the room in the confusion. His host subsequently brought down word from the discomfited seer to the effect that Colchester was 'so outraged by this insult' that he refused to reappear!
>
> A day or two after this, I was astonished by a note from Mrs. Lincoln requesting me to come to the White House without a moment's delay, on a matter of the most distressing importance. On my arrival, the lady, somewhat discomposed, showed me a note from 'Colchester,' in which he requested that she should procure for him from the War Department a pass to New York, and intimated that in case she refused he might have some unpleasant things to say to her. We made an arrangement by which Colchester came to the White House at a specified hour the next day, and after I had been formally introduced to the charlatan, Mrs. Lincoln withdrew from the room. Going up to Colchester, I lifted the hair from the scar

> on my forehead, yet unhealed, and said, 'Do you recognize this? The man muttered something about his having been insulted, and then I said: 'You know that I know you are a swindler and a humbug. Get out of this house and out of this city at once. If you are in Washington to-morrow afternoon at this time, you will be at the old Capitol prison.' The little scamp pulled himself together and sneaked out of the house, and, so far as I know, out of Washington. I never saw or heard of him afterward.[1]

Lincoln scholar Daniel Mark Epstein noted: "Lincoln was concerned enough about Colchester's influence to consult with Dr. Joseph Henry, an eminent scientist and secretary of the Smithsonian Institution. The scientist invited Colchester to demonstrate his powers in one of the rooms of the Smithsonian. Henry reported to the president that the 'medium' was a fake – the sound he produced were coming from his own body; but Henry could not prove this without thoroughly examining him; and the trickster refused to disrobe."[2] Epstein wrote: "Colchester's banishment, occurring in the summer of 1863, marked the beginning of the end of Mrs. Lincoln's séances at home, but it was not the end of her commerce with spirits. She continued to consult with mediums in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia until a few years before she died."[3]

Footnotes

1. Herbert Mitgang, editor, Noah Brooks, *Washington in Lincoln's Time*, p. 66-68.
2. Daniel Mark Epstein, *The Lincolns: Portrait of a Marriage*, p. 385
3. Epstein, *The Lincolns: Portrait of a Marriage*, p. 386

Visit

Noah Brooks
Mary Todd Lincoln
Soldiers' Homes

Mr Lincoln's White House
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Orville Browning

Orville Hickman Browning (1806-1881)

Senator from Illinois (Republican, 1861-62) who was appointed by Governor Richard Yates to succeed Stephen Douglas on his death in June 1861 thus infuriating Illinois Democrats. A personal and political friend of President Lincoln, Browning was a frequent visitor to the White House, discussing political and military affairs as well as reading poetry. Browning and the President often went on rides together. Sometimes, he attended church with the Lincolns and returned with them to the White House for Sunday lunch. During his short term, he often seemed to serve as the President's spokesman in the Senate.

Browning had unsuccessfully sought appointment to the Supreme Court in 1861; David Davis got the appointment to a third Court vacancy in August 1862. Browning's wife herself wrote the President on June 8, 1861 to urge the appointment of her husband in because "I know my husband to be one of the wisest, best men in the Nation."[1] Browning himself wrote Mr. Lincoln on April 9, 1861: "You know me about as well as I know myself; and in regard to my fitness for the office you know me better—for you occupy a far better stand point for the formation of a fair and impartial judgment than I do....I say frankly, and without any sort of disguise or affectation, that there is nothing in your power to do for me which would gratify me so much as this. It is an office peculiarly adapted to my tastes, and the faithful and honest performance of the duties of which would be my highest pride and ambition."[2]

Davis also had strong Illinois advocates for the Supreme Court, including Leonard Swett, who wrote his wife in August 1862: "A few nights before I left [Washington] I called upon Mrs. Lincoln. She told me she had been fighting Davis's battles, that Browning had gone home, & she was glad of it—that he became distressingly loving just before he left. She told me to tell Judge Davis that his matter was all right. She seemed very glad and very positive of it. When I left, she told me again at the door to tell Judge Davis his matter was all right."[3] Swett himself later wrote:

> Mr. Browning had the advantage that Lincoln was new in his seat, and Senators were August personages; and, being in the senate and a most courteous and ble gentleman, Mr. Browning succeeded in securing nearly all the senatorial stgrength; and Mr. Lincoln was nearly swept off his feet by the current of influence. Davis' supporters were the circuit lawyers mainly in the eastern and central part of the State. These lawyers were at home, and their presence was not a living force felt constantly by the President at Washington." [4]

Swett's own influence must have been considerable because he himself heard that the President had declared: "I do not know what I may do when the time comes, but there has never been a day when if I had to act I should not have appointed Browning." Swett believed the remark authentic and determined to make one more effort to persuade President Lincoln. He went to Washington and reminded Mr. Lincoln of his political debts to Davis.[5]

Both Brownings remained at the White House with Willie's body the night after the Lincoln's third son died in February 1862. Sen. Browning took care of funeral arrangements for Willie Lincoln.

Browning opposed emancipation and was defeated in 1862 Democratic sweep in Illinois. About a month after Browning's defeat that November, President Lincoln was beset by Republican senators upset about his war and political policies. "What do these men want? They wish to get rid of me, and I am sometimes half disposed to gratify them," complained the President about Republican Radicals.[6]

When Browning lost his Senate seat in the 1862 elections, he was pushed forward as a candidate to succeed Caleb Smith as Secretary of the Interior. On December 14, 1862, Browning recorded in his diary : "Mrs Lincoln sent her carriage this morning for me to go to Church with her which I did. The President did not go. After Church she rode with me to Capitol Hill. On our way down she told me the President was anxious to get Secretary Smith out of the Cabinet, and me in his place. That he was anxious to have Mrs Browning and myself in Washington, and the only thing that would prevent him offering me the place would be the fear of having it said he was giving everything to Illinois, but she thought he would do it—She knew he wished to."[7] Biographer Maurice G. Baxter noted: "On December 24 [1862] Postmaster General Montgomery Blair congratulated Browning and insisted it was settled that he would be appointed secretary of the interior. Browning rather weakly replied that he could not take it if he were chosen. But Lincoln did not at any time actually offer Browning the secretaryship, nor is there conclusive proof that he intended to do so."[8]

Senator Browning continued to be a trusted confidante during the period—which included the attempt by Radical Senators to oust William H. Seward and reorganize the Cabinet in the wake of the Union defeat at Fredericksburg. On December 1862, Browning recorded in his diary that Mr. Lincoln complained: "They wish to get rid of me, and I am sometimes half disposed to gratify them...We are now on the brink of destruction. It appears to me the Almighty is against us, and I can hardly see a ray of hope." The President complained of the effort to remove Seward: "Why will men believe a lie, an absurd lie, that could not impose upon a child, and cling to it and repeat it in defiance of all evidence to the contrary." Mr. Lincoln was more hopeful the next day, saying to Browning that he was trying to "keep things along." Over the next several days, he continued to talk with the President and helped to keep Seward in the Cabinet. By December 22, Browning wrote in his diary that he told Mr. Lincoln that the Radical senators' "game was to drive all the cabinet out—then force upon him the recall of Mr [Salmon P. Chase] as Premier, and form a cabinet of ultra men around him. [Mr. Lincoln] said with a good deal of emphasis that he was master, and they should not do that."[9]

Although a trusted friend who presumed upon the friendship for favors and patronage, Browning doubted Lincoln's leadership abilities as President and supported Edward Bates for the Republican nomination in 1860. (Lincoln himself voted against Browning for State's Attorney in the first legislative session in which he served.) After he lost 1862 election, Browning opened a successful law firm. He also tried to be cotton broker and get trading permits for friends—which President Lincoln permitted but General Ulysses S. Grant and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton effectively blocked in late 1864 and early 1865. Browning used his friendship with the President to press his patronage and pardon requests. Among the beneficiaries of his pressure was the President's own brother-in-law, Ninian Edwards, husband of Elizabeth Todd Edwards.

His diary has become an important source of information about Mr. Lincoln's White House. One controversial entry from July 3, 1861 suggested that President Lincoln had manipulated the situation in Fort Sumter to put the onus of the war on the secessionists. Browning wrote:

> He told me that the very first thing placed in his hands after his inauguration was a letter from Majr Anderson announcing the impossibility of defending or relieving Sumter. That he called the Cabinet together, and consulted Genl. Scot—that Scott concurred with Anderson, and the cabinet, with the exception of himself and P M Genl. Blair were for

> evacuating the the Fort, and that all the troubles and anxieties of his life had not equally those which intervened between this time and the fall of Sumter. He himself conceived the idea, and proposed sending supplies, without an attempt to reinforce giving notice of the fact to Gov Pickins of S.C. The plan succeeded. They attacked Sumter—it fell, and thus, did more service than it otherwise could.[10]

Browning's "manner provoked attention. Though conservative, he was not reticent; though proper, not retiring. His movements were both and self-assured; he was not one to recede into the background of spectators. Whatever part he took in affairs, he wanted it to be a prominent one, not trivial or obscure," wrote biographer Baxter.[11] Often conventional and sometimes arrogant, Browning's personality contrasted with that of Mr. Lincoln. Nevertheless, Browning exemplified the multiple pressures of visitors to the White House. He was a prolific letter writer, a seeker of patronage and favors, a giver of solicited and unsolicited advice, an elected official, a supporter and an opponent, and a seeker of judicial appointment. He also represented the contradictory opinions of Mr. Lincoln's advisors. Early in the war, Browning was a militant and supported General John C. Fremont's order freeing slaves in Missouri, writing the President in September 1861: "There has been too much tenderness toward traitors and rebels. Later in the Senate, he opposed tough congressional action against Southern slaveowners and argued that tough actions were solely an executive power. However, when President Lincoln himself issued the Emancipation Proclamation, Browning opposed it. He also worried about military abuses of civil liberties. In 1864, he even wavered on supported the President for reelection, writing a friend:

> You know, strange as it may seem to you, that I am personally attached to the President, and have faithfully tried to uphold him, and make him respectable; tho' I never have been able to persuade myself that he was big enough for his position. Still, I thought he might get through, as many a boy through college, without disgrace, and without knowledge; and I fear he is a failure.

Browning first served with Lincoln in 1837 in the Illinois Legislature where he served for seven years; he was defeated by Stephen A. Douglas for Congress in 1852. Later, he served as Interior Secretary (1866-69) under President Andrew Johnson, whom he supported during impeachment and served briefly as Attorney General. Browning's wife, Eliza was one of Lincoln's first upscale female friends.

Footnotes

1. David Mearns, *The Lincoln Papers*, p. 630-631.
2. Maurice G. Baxter, *Orville H. Browning: Lincoln's Friend and Critic*, p. 112.
3. Willard L. King, *Lincoln's Manager: David Davis*, p. 195.
4. William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik, *Life of Lincoln*, p. 406.
5. Herndon and Weik, *Life of Lincoln*, p. 406-407.
6. David Donald, *Lincoln*, p. 402.
7. Theodore Pease, editor, *Diary of Orville Hickman Browning*, Volume I, p. 596.
8. Baxter, p. 111.
9. Pease, Volume I, p. 600.
10. Pease, Volume I, p. 476.
11. Baxter, p. 158.

Visit

Mary Todd Lincoln

Leonard Swett
David Davis
Andrew Johnson
Elizabeth Todd Edwards
Stephen A. Douglas
John Palmer Usher
Biography
Biography (link two)
Biography (link three)
Browning Diary

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Isaac Newton

Isaac Newton

Commissioner of Agriculture, horticulturalist, and political ally of Attorney General Edward Bates. He was first appointed chief clerk in the Patent Office's Bureau of Agriculture in 1861. In May 1862, Congress authorized the appointment of a commissioner of agriculture to oversee the dissemination of information about agriculture and samples for planting. "It was natural for Lincoln to promote to the position the Patent Office clerk who had looked after agricultural matters, Isaac Newton—a Quaker with a farm of his own in Pennsylvania. Newton soon had a chemist, an entomomlogist, a statistician, and most important of all, the versatile Scottish—born botanist William Saunders, working beside him,." wrote historian Allan Nevins.[1] Newton himself inspired less admiration. "He was an ignorant, credulous old gentleman, quite rotund about the waistband, with snow—white hair and a mild blue eye," wrote Ben Perley Poore.[2]

He was also a gossipy Quaker and a spiritualist who became a friend of Mary Todd Lincoln and introduced her to some of Washington's other spiritualists. Two of them were hired in the Bureau of Agriculture at Mrs. Lincoln's request. According to historian Margaret Leech, he was so stupid "he once made requisition for two hydraulic rams, because he had been told they were the best sheep in Europe But he was honest and kind, and he befriended Mrs. Lincoln, preventing he said dreadful disclosures."[3]

Newton helped engineer the coverup of gardener John Watt's blackmail of Mrs. Lincoln. John Hay recorded in his diary of February 13, 1867 an interview he had with "Father Newton": "he launched off in his buzzing way about Mrs. Lincoln how imprudent she was—how he protected & watched over her & prevented dreadful disclosures; how at one time when Watt had entered into a conspiracy to extort 20,000 from the President by using three letters of Mrs Lincoln, he sent for [Simeon] Draper who went to Watt in his greenhouse on 14th Street & told him he was come to take him to Fort Lafayette, with much bluster & great oaths as Simeon's wont; how Watt fell on his literal marrow bones & begged, & gave up the letters & the conspiracy got demoralized & came down, down, to 1500 dollars which was paid, and the whole ting settled. 'Oh,' said the old fellow, 'that lady has set here on this here sofa & shed tears by the pint a begging me to pay her debts which was unbeknown to the President. There was one big bill for furs which give her a sight of trouble—she got it paid at last by some of her friends—I don't know who for certain—not Sim Draper for he promised to pay it afore Cuthbert but after Lincoln's death he wouldn't do it."[4]

Bates recorded in his February 3 1862 diary: "Certainly friend Newton does hear more gossip than anyone I know."[5] Bates recorded in his February 25, 1863 diary: "At night, Mr. Newton and Mr. Sargent called to see me, and Mr. N (as usual) had secrets to tell—He took me aside to say he must have a talk with me, but now—saying only that he had just had a long private talk with the P. partly about me—that the P. assured him that he had full and unabated confidence in Me."[6] On May 23 1863, Bates wrote: "Today Isaac Newton told me, as a great secret, that Gen. [Henry Halleck] was a confirmed opium—eater— as he is very credibly informed.."[7] Bates recorded in his February 28,1864 diary: "Friend Newton is full of news. He tells me today, that a secret pamphlet has been gotten up (he thinks, by the machinations of Secy. [John Usher] and Senator [Samuel] Pomeroy) levelled agst. Mrs. L. in reference to the infamous [John] Watt scandal. He expects to get a copy tomorrow; and if it turn out to be what he supposes, thinks it will produce an explosion."[8]

On the night President Lincoln was assassinated, it was Newton who brought word to the White House, according to doorkeeper Thomas Pendel: "Probably about twenty minutes before eleven o'clock, I stepped up to the door in answer to another ring at the bell. Who should be there but Isaac Newton, the Commissioner of Agriculture....I admitted him inside the door, and at once closed it. He was a bosom friend of President Lincoln. I was thoroughly acquainted with him, and I knew to whom I was talking. He said to me, 'They have shot the President. And the bullet', he said, 'has entered the left side of his head'. I immediately hurried upstairs, leaving him on the inside, and went to Captain Robert Lincoln's room."[9]

Newton's Quaker connections were also important to the White House. It was Newton who served as the bearer of a message of support in 1863 from noted Quaker Eliza Gurney: "I feel inclined to give the assurance of my continued hearty sympathy in all thy heavy burdens and responsibilities and to express, not only my own earnest prayers, but I believe the prayers of many thousands whose hearts thou has gladdened by thy praiseworthy and successful effort 'to burst the bands of wickedness, and let the oppressed go free'..."[10]

After with Mrs. Gurney, President Lincoln had written her on October 26, 1862: "I am glad of this interview, and glad to know that I have your sympathy and prayers. We are indeed going through a great trial—a fiery trial. In the very responsible position in which I happen to be placed, being a humble instrument in the hands of our Heavenly Father, as I am, and as we all are, to work out his great purposes, I have desired that all my works and acts may be according to his will, and that it might be so, I have sought his aid—but if after endeavoring to do my best in the light which he affords me, I find my efforts fail, I must believe that for some purpose unknown to me, He wills it otherwise. If I had had my way, this war would never have been commenced; If I had been allowed my way this war would have been commenced; If I had been allowed my way this war would have been ended before this, but we find it still continues; and we must believe that He permits it for some wise purpose of his own, mysterious and unknown to us; and though with our limited understandings we may not be able to comprehend it, yet we cannot but believe, that he who made the world still governs it."[11]

Footnotes

1. Allan Nevins, *The War for the Union: War Becomes Revolution*, 1862-1863.
2. Ben Perley Poore, *Perley's Reminiscences*, Volume II, p. 124.
3. Margaret Leech, *Reveille in Washington*, p. 301.
4. Tyler Dennett, *Lincoln and the Civil War in the Diaries and Letters of John Hay*, p. 273-274.
5. Howard K. Beale, editor, *The Diary of Edward Bates*, p 228.
6. Beale, editor, *The Diary of Edward Bates*, p. 279.
7. Beale, editor, *The Diary of Edward Bates*, p. 293.
8. *Diary of Edward Bates*, p. 341.
9. Thomas Pendel, *Thirty Six Years at the White House*, p. 43-45.
10. Roy P. Basler, editor, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume VII, p. 536.
11. Basler, editor, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume V, p. 478.

Visit

Mary Todd Lincoln
Edward Bates
John Watt
Mary Ann Cuthbert
John Hay

Dan Sickles

Gen. Dan Sickles (1819-1914)

Congressman from New York who shot Philip Barton Key for having an affair with his wife, Sickles was seriously wounded and his leg was later amputated.

He was moved to a private house in Washington where on July 5, President Lincoln visited him. Sickles later claimed that during this visit, Mr. Lincoln related why he was confident of victory. After the Confederate invaded the North, he said he "went to my room and got down on my knees in prayer. Never before had I prayed with so much earnestness. I wish I could repeat my prayer. I felt I must put all my trust in Almighty God. He gave our people the best country ever given to man. He alone could save it from destruction. I had tried my best to do my duty and had found myself unequal to the task The burden was more than I could bear. I asked Him to help us victory now. I was sure my prayer was answered. I had no misgivings about the result at Gettysburg."[1]

For the rest of his life, Sickles defended his "key" role in the Gettysburg victory and denigrated the leadership of Union General George Meade. After his amputation, Sickles remained in Washington and frequently visited President or Mrs. Lincoln. Indeed, within two days of the Battle of Gettysburg, President Lincoln visited the convalescent Sickles in Washington. Gideon Welles recorded in his diary how Sickles presented his version of the Battle of Gettysburg to Mr. Lincoln at the White House on October 20, 1863: "I met General Sickles at the President's to-day. When I went in, the President was asking if Hancock did not select the battle-ground at Gettysburg. Sickles said he did not, but that General Howard and perhaps himself, were more entitled to that credit than any others. He then detailed particulars, making himself, however, much more conspicuous than Howard, who was really used as a set-off. The narrative was, in effect, that General Howard had taken possession of the heights and occupied on Wednesday, the 1st. He, Sickles, arrived later, between five and six P.M., and liked the position. General Meade arrived on the ground soon after, and was for abandoning the position and falling back. A council was called; Meade was earnest; Sickles left, but wrote Meade his decided opinion in favor of maintaining the position, which was finally agreed to against Meade's judgment."[2] These attacks caused prolonged professional grief to General Meade.

Sickles, admittedly not the most reliable of observers, later said that President Lincoln claimed not to be anxious about the Battle of Gettysburg: "In the pinch of the campaign up there, when everybody seemed panic-stricken, and nobody could tell what was going to happen, oppressed by the gravity of our affairs, I went to my room one day, and I locked the door, and got down on my knees before Almighty God, and prayed to Him mightily for victory at Gettysburg. I told Him that this was His war, and our cause His cause, but we couldn't stand another Fredericksburg or Chancellorsville. And I then and there made a solemn vow to Almighty God, that if He would stand by our boys at Gettysburg, I would stand by Him. And He *did* stand by your boys, and I will stand by Him. And after that (I don't know how it was, and I can't explain it), soon a sweet comfort crept into my soul that God Almighty had taken the whole business into his own hands and that things would go all right at Gettysburg. And that is why I had no fears about you."[3] Sickles visited the White House one night in December 1863 when there was a confrontation over Confederate sympathies of Mary Todd Lincoln's half-sister, Emilie Todd Helm. Sickles went up to the President's office to complain about "that rebel" in the White House. 'Excuse me, General Sickles, my wife and I are in the habit of choosing our own guests," responded President Lincoln. "We do not need from our friends either advice or assistance in

the matter. Besides, 'the little 'rebel' came because I ordered her to come, it was not of her own volition."[4] Sickles attended a seance with Mary Todd Lincoln on February 20, 1864. He supposedly was used by Mrs. Lincoln as a test for the powers of medium Nettie Colburn Maynard who identified him as "Crooked Knife," a loose translation of Sickles' last name.

Sickles was an unprincipled opportunist whose reputation had not been enhanced by his comradeship with Union commander Joseph Hooker, whose vices as commander of the Army of the Potomac were well publicized. One strong view was earlier expressed by New Yorker George Templeton Strong, who wrote that Sickles was "one of the bigger bubbles in the scum of the [legal] profession, swollen and windy, and puffed out with fetid gas."[5]

He was returned to Army service as commander of the Carolinas, from which post President Andrew Johnson removed him. President Ulysses Grant appointed him American Minister to Spain, where he managed to engage in undiplomatic relations with the queen.

Footnotes

1. Rufus Rockwell Wilson, editor, *Intimate Memories of Lincoln*, p. 574.
2. Gideon Welles, *Diary of Gideon Welles*, Volume I, p. 472-473.
3. William Wolf, *The Almost Chosen People*, p. 125.
4. Katherine Helm, *Mary, Wife of Lincoln*, p. 231.
5. Stephen Sears, *Controversies & Commanders*, p. 198.

Visit

Mary Todd Lincoln
George Meade
Emilie Todd Helm
Red Room
William H. Seward's House
David Davis
Biography
Biography (link two)
Biography (link three)
Biography (link four)
Testimony on Gettysburg

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Spiritualism Names

Authors MTL Really Liked

Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873)—San Jose State University holds its annual "Dark and Stormy Night" bad writing contest in honor of his literary contributions

Charles Read

Wilkie Collins

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps

Spiritualists with Connections to MTL

Name	Location	Citations
Lord Colchester, came to WH in 1862		Baker, 219
[Mrs. Leonard] Howard [Healer, Business and Test]	Howard Hotel St. Charles, Ill.	Baker, 309 The Religio-Philosophical Journal (Chicago), March 30, 1872 spirithistory.com
[Isaac P. Greenleaf? 1061 Wash St] 1870 Banner of Light [Mrs. A. L. Lambert 959 Wash Street] 1870 Banner of Light [Mrs. A. C. Latham, 292 Washington Street] The Religio-Philosophical Journal (Chicago), March 30, 1872 spirithistory.com [Mrs. J. M. Carpenter, 1567 Washington St.] [Healer] The Religio-Philosophical Journal (Chicago), March	West Washington, Boston	Baker, 309

30, 1872 spirithistory.com		
Moravia, NY (1871)		
William Mumler, spirit photographer (1872)		
Elizabeth Slataper amateur clairvoyant whom she had met in the PA Alleghenies, 1868		Baker, 283
Mrs. Farwell		Neely and McMurtry, 77
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